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C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 000638

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV KDEM AF

SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT CONFIRMS TRANSPORTATION MINISTER;  
REJECTS HAJJ NOMINEE

REF: KABUL 535

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Christopher Dell for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Parliament confirmed Hamidullah Farooqi as Minister of Transportation in a March 16 vote. Farooqi received 131 yes votes, easily surpassing the 85 necessary for confirmation. Hajj Minister Nominee, Sediq Chakari, however, failed to gain Parliament's nod, receiving support from only 52 MPs.

¶2. (C) Farooqi has served as acting Transportation Minister since February, replacing former acting Transportation Minister Mohammad Omar Zakhial who left to head the Finance Ministry. Farooqi gave a well-received, organized speech to Parliament laying out his specific plans to improve the Ministry's operations, particularly detailing his plans to support Hajj travelers.

¶3. (C) President Karzai nominated United Front executive committee member Chakari to replace Hajj Minister Nematullah Shahrani, who Karzai removed in response to allegations of nepotism due to his son Wahidullah Shahrani's appointment as Minister of Commerce. By nominating Charkari, Karzai continued his strategy of dividing and conquering the opposition (reftel) by giving the impression (genuine or not) that he had secured Chakari's loyalty.

¶4. (C) Chakari said Karzai first offered him the position more than six weeks ago, but Chakari only recently accepted the nomination after heavy lobbying from Karzai ally MP Abdul Rassoul Sayyaf and fellow UF member Marshall Fahim. Both Sayyaf and Fahim argued that the UF lacked cohesion and would not be in a position to seriously challenge Karzai in the upcoming election. They urged Chakari, an Islamic scholar fluent in Arabic, to join the government to strengthen Karzai's hand in negotiations over executive authority following the 5/22 constitutional expiration of Karzai's term.

¶5. (C) In a March 17 conversation with the DCM, MP Sayyaf said the UF rallied votes against Chakari to punish him for accepting Karzai's offer. Chakari's unimpressive presentation during the confirmation hearing, punctuated by MPs loudly accusing him of corruption and bad intentions, also contributed to his dismal vote count. Karzai will likely ask Chakari to serve as acting Minister of Hajj, which does not require Parliament's approval, Sayyaf said.

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